

# Commonality in Relativity: What philosophy can still offer in our post-modern world.

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Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2005

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**Commonality in Relativity**  
**What philosophy can still offer in our post-modern world.**

by

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**Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts  
in the  
Arts and Sciences Honors Program  
of  
Boston College**

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**Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts  
May 2005**

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## INTRODUCTION

This work was inspired by my introduction to a text called *After Philosophy*. This anthology of postmodern philosophers poses the question again and again whether, in light of the inevitable and ultimate subjectivity of humans and the world, there is any present value in a philosophical pursuit which aspires to reveal universal truths and ideals. The exercise of immersing myself within these different trends of thoughts, questioning minds, and voices ironically became the type of process I chose to analyze (that of proper philosophical conversation and exchange). This text existentially showed me that philosophy houses its eternal worth in its ability to inspire the appropriate, or at least better, question and then to reveal and to foster the appropriate conversation aiming towards a better answer concerning the human existence.

Philosophy serves as the forum through which this crucial dialogue can and should take place, as I discovered personally during my reading of *After Philosophy*. The questions that occurred in me while reading *After Philosophy* gently pushed me towards better questions and better exploration. This microcosmic experience served as a small example of the power and capability of a conversation driven by questions, where the answer serves only to better situate the question. Such was my experience: and indeed it was a very worthy one. Appropriately enough, no answer was found, only more questions were asked.

Through personal experience I know that philosophy maintains its value in its power to question and its noble and dignified desire to answer to the best of its ability. In this subjective age, philosophy has its conversations, and these conversations are progressing towards a beneficial and better destination. And so this work will conclude

with many questions and few, if any, answers. This is not, however, unprofitable, as it is the questions which push us ultimately towards the right answers. The subjective questioner must constantly resituate himself and his exploration so that he may understand when the answer (that perhaps has always been there waiting) is revealed in light of the right question. The answer will become apparent when we ask the right question, and we will only reach the right question through the parrying trial and error of philosophical conversation. In the light of post-modernity, however, there is no longer an easy or obvious conversation to be had. The focus must now be on the conversation itself, and thus the proper method of conversing.

Modernity has cast a dark and ominous shadow on any human certainty, as certainty itself is now a relative and convertible concept. Post-modernity grows even darker, edging towards philosophical nihilism with the imprisoning interest in the so-called “linguistic turn.” In the midst of this black-out of meaning and truth, humans and society are cast adrift in a sea of relativity, as each wave casts yet another meaningless interpretation of the most recent interpretation, until all meaning has been stripped. All that remains is the empty tool of a language, void of substance, used simply to contort, compare, and contrast. Part I presents the problem of transient meaning and truth in its original founding.

The collapse of the Enlightenment, reflected in Martin Heidegger’s brilliant work *Being and Time*, leaves us with the conclusion that all of reality is a relative experience. Human beings interact with the world in very specific, historical and localized ways; all that we know is first perceived, and these perceptions are never without bias. Thus, the world becomes, for everyone, a kaleidoscope of images perceived through a prism of

understanding. The world is not the world, until one sees it as so. And every human sees the “world” always and only in direct relationship to himself. The world, in fact, does not exist until man perceives it. There is no objectivity: human beings simply do not perceive, intuit, or think in a way that allows them to know things as they are “in themselves.” There can not be, at least in the Platonic sense, absolute universal truths. If there were a universal truth, in light of Heidegger we must accept that every human community would, by nature, perceive this hypothetical universal differently. These varying and subjective perceptions of this hypothetical universal would quickly render knowledge of it non-universal.

If it all is, in fact, subjective then philosophy can quickly seem impotent and unimportant as it is simply a glorified, if not eloquent, account of what I perceive of my world. We instinctively know this not to be the case, however, because if there was absolutely no common ground in humanity, no suggestion of universal qualities or entities, there could be no community of humans. Humanity would not be collective but instead individual and anarchical, as each perception would be so radically different there would be no ground for a common language or common experience.

What draws us together and compels us to ask these questions and tirelessly work to construct a response? What commonality allows us to construct a language through which we can communicate this experience? What is it that compels every society to write its own story, to attest vehemently to its particular plot-line and proclaim it as true? What is the essential element in all of humanity cross-culturally to be considered? What is this permanence which motivates all of society to move forward in its explanation and understanding of itself, on a societal as well as personal level? To simply name this

essential element as the human condition seems too easy and, frankly, glib. What is then, one could ask, the human condition? Every society would construct its own, different answer, and we would be back where we started, subtly brushing the most troubling and indeed important questions of philosophy under the carpet because they are at once too challenging and too daunting and, after all, only relative.

Such philosophical neglect would be utterly tragic and would impact the quality of society. The pursuit of philosophy must be continued for the betterment of both society and the improvement of this elusive concept of the human condition. We evolve through self-examination. This obsessive, frustrating, never-ending examining is what it essentially means to be human. The methods with which or perspectives from which we examine ourselves and our society, of course, vary with time and location; but this examination and alteration is all that humanity has to offer itself and what it essentially means to be human. If we are to better ourselves and our societies at all, we must first seek to understand them, and to understand them thoroughly and to the best of our ability. Thus, philosophy in its most dignified pursuit turns to the possibility of understanding and the quality of a truth reached through understanding. How are we to understand ourselves, and more importantly, how are we to affirm our findings?

Through our personal bequest of human exploration we, as a society of humans, all enduring the same unending condition, begin to arrive at similar conclusions which we share, recognize, and affirm through conversation with each other. This conversation affirms that the truths I have arrived upon, at least for the moment, are valid for another human intellect and experience. These truths become real in their very commonality, affirmed through recognition (they become “true for us”). This conversation, which

reveals recognition and commonality within human communities quickly, becomes what we have -- tragically all we have -- at least for now. This conversation can and must lead us towards something better, something bigger, something more important than ourselves.

I hold fast to this belief or, better yet, instinct, that there are ideal objectives to which humanity must always and continually strive, because without them it is indeed all for naught. More importantly there is a common strain that runs through all cultures and has always been present within the diversity that is humanity. This common strain is that of dissatisfaction and doubt: the irking voice within every human that pushes him forward to ask what he does not know, to look tirelessly for a better more comprehensive answer. It is the thirst to understand, to understand ourselves.

This desire drives societies and cultures to better understand themselves and, through the exchange of conversation, we better understand this process. Eventually, perhaps, this conversation will reveal the source of our incessant questioning and its response will satisfy our constant doubt: this would be the ultimate truth and meaning, the ultimate understanding of humanity. Until then, however, all we have that is real, recognized, and shared is our conversation, inspired by these questions wrought with doubt and dissatisfaction. In the spirit of such conversation Part II of this thesis speaks of three different philosophers, all of whom believe that conversation is the answer - for now.

Charles Sanders Peirce, with whom I cannot help but ally, explains that at some point this conversation will come to an end because we will have achieved the final answer. He does not presume to suggest that humanity will ever actually reach this



endpoint. He instead insists that the inherent drive towards this endpoint is the only process present and accessible to us and in fact our only chance for the progress and betterment of ourselves and our society. Through conversation, we foster better conversation, and through better conversation we arrive at better understanding of our questions, and thus better actions concerning their answers.

Richard Rorty does not share Peirce's optimistic view of the eternal progress of human society. But he does believe that conversation offers an invaluable opportunity for human communities to flesh out the best course of action concerning anything and everything (including conversation itself). For Rorty, the best and most proper exchange of thoughts and ideas, executed most properly through a society's systematic language, will most definitely create the best (most good and most true) conclusion concerning any problem. Conversation becomes the human salve to the human condition, and the best salve is that which best understands the elements of conversation and uses them properly.

David Tracy seems the most appropriate place to leave the question and anxiously await the reader's response to this new conversation. Tracy speaks to the concerns of both Peirce and Rorty, as he focuses mainly on the methodology behind a successful conversation that will arrive upon the conclusions that are the most true or the most good for a particular society. The proper conversation should revolve around disclosure, concealment, and recognition. Through these tools we can execute a conversation Rorty would approve of and that Peirce tells us will push us closer to the ultimate understanding and the ultimate truths and universals of the human condition.

This thesis then concludes appropriately nowhere, yet somewhere, as you will find the conclusion to be no more than a proposition. It has achieved no answer; only a

better understanding of the question. Yet in light of Peirce, Rorty, and Tracy, it seems that even this new question must be something. A better understanding of the question must surely lead to a better, higher quality discussion. This discussion will most definitely yield an answer of higher quality, an answer that brings us a little closer to universal truths. Thus the conclusion is no more than a question that anxiously awaits a conversation to follow.

# **PART ONE: THE SOURCE OF POST-MODERN RELATIVISM**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Before we may expound on the way out of post-modern relativism (in Part Two of the thesis), we must first establish a firm understanding of the origin of this relativism. Heidegger's *Being and Time* provides a clear and methodical elucidation of the problem of human subjectivity and the collapse of the Enlightenment belief in objective knowledge. Heidegger addresses this problem always in reference to the human being, or Dasein, the point of all subjectivity and also (as we will see) the creator of the world. Thus, Heidegger develops an ontological study of man, showing through this study that man is the center of the universe which he perceives and creates. This indisputable observation collapses the previous tradition's view of knowledge and reality as an objective entity posited from outside existing for the human being to observe. After Heidegger's phenomenology is completed, Dasein must realize it is only through his eyes that anything may exist and in his mind that he attributes each object's respective existence. Thus, we end our study of Heidegger with a firm understanding that nothing is for certain, and all is dependent on Dasein.

## **2. THE ONTOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DASEIN**

For Heidegger, the ontological significance of Dasein is tantamount to Dasein's ability to interpret the world he intuitively grasps and his need to then exist in this world. This world exists only as Dasein perceives it. Dasein acts within the realm of this world first to cultivate and then to understand knowledge. "Dasein always understands himself in terms of its existence" (Heidegger 33). That is the "human being is essentially self-interpreting: the essence of Dasein lies in its existence" (Dreyfus 23). The construction and pursuit of knowledge is directly related to Dasein's construction of his world. To understand correctly any worldly knowledge, we must first understand how Dasein exists in his world. His existence becomes an active state of interpretation and construction. Dasein creates the world and asserts meaning through his being-in-the-world as a self-interpreting being.

Once Dasein's ontological existence is defined as self-interpreting, the theory of truth and knowledge must shift towards the subjectivity and inter-subjectivity of knowledge and truth. The interpretive being, or Dasein, was always understood to participate in the interpretation of knowledge or truths through understanding. Heidegger shows us, however, that through Dasein's active interpretation he simultaneously affects the construction and substance of the worldly knowledge and truth he is interpreting. The human self-interpreter is no longer an instrument objectively functioning to understand. With Heidegger, knowledge becomes subjective and truth becomes inter-subjective, as the truths we seek to understand are changed and affected by our attempts to understand them.

Dasein interprets and creates his knowledge. This “hermeneutic phenomenology” explains that the only way to expound on human knowledge is through “the interpretation of humans as essentially self-interpreting, thereby showing that interpretation is the proper method for studying human beings” (Dreyfus 35). The first division of *Being and Time* attempts to elucidate Dasein as a self-interpreting being. “Heidegger wants to describe the structure of the self-interpreting way of being that we, and other entities such as cultures, are” (Dreyfus 23). This exploration shows that knowledge is correctly understood as subjective. Since Dasein’s ontological existence is that of a self-interpreting being, knowledge is affected by and dependent on Dasein’s interpretations.

Through exploring Dasein’s ontological existence, therefore, we arrive also at a better understanding of the substance and function of worldly truths and knowledge. The essence of Dasein rests in his existence, and he comports himself always towards this being. Dasein’s existence is no longer one of a Cartesian *res cogitans* objectively thinking and processing information. The previous tradition constructed this theory of an objective mind functioning as a neutral tool fueled by intelligence because it ignored Dasein’s “average-every-dayness.” This is the essence of Dasein and must be included in its problematic if the inquiry is to be valid and comprehensive. “...[I]t is particularly important that Dasein should not be Interpreted with the undifferentiated character of some definite way of existing, but that it should be uncovered in the undifferentiated character which it has proximally and for the most part” (Heidegger 69).

The way Dasein exists in the world on a daily basis, his mundane, monotonous, yet pertinent “average-every-dayness,” has been previously overlooked, and thus Dasein and truth have been misunderstood up to this point. Descartes “investigates the ‘cogitare’

of the 'ego' at least within certain limits...he leaves the 'sum' completely undiscussed even though it is regarded as no less primordial than the cogito. Our analytic question raises the question of the 'sum.' Not until the nature of this being has been determined can we grasp the nature of the 'cogitationes.'"(Heidegger 71-72). Descartes fails to explain the ontological foundations of the 'I am' when he makes the 'I am' self-evident. He establishes the mode of thinking as the totality of Dasein's existence. But this act of thinking is simply one mode of Dasein's being, not the defining characteristic of Dasein. The tradition has previously selected different modes of Dasein's being and ontically assigned them the priority of encompassing all of Dasein (or what Heidegger would call Dasein's ontological significance).

When Descartes equated Dasein's ontological being with the mode of thinking, the world became a playground of neutral objects existing for Dasein's objective interpretation. Suddenly Dasein could think his way to Enlightenment, interpreting all worldly objects without bias and with certainty. The Enlightened thinker existed to neutrally act out the "syncretistic activity of universal comparison and classification" (Heidegger 77). Through the mode of thinking Dasein was understood to objectively classify the objects in the world and ontically categorize them. Dasein is no more than a methodical robot using logic and intelligence to order objects *ad infinitum*.

This thought methodology is outlined and explained in both the Cartesian method and the Kantian method. Kant explains, in depth, the function of the human mind and shows that it exists only to draw correlations and logically apply labels to worldly objects as they are observed through the senses. Heidegger shows that this method, though ontically fruitful for it at least grasps that Dasein interprets the world, grants us only the

“objective fertility” of the sciences. (Heidegger 71) It does not at all shed light on Dasein’s being, and thus sheds no light on the world and its truths. “Subjecting the manifold to tabulation does not ensure any actual understanding of what lies there before us as thus set in order” (Heidegger 77). The world is not, however, created from this Kantian or Cartesian objectivity. Man is not an objective observer simply processing the intuited information posited from objects in an environment. Dasein does not exist in the world as such.

We must first illuminate how Dasein creates his world before we can explore his understanding or interpretation of this world. Dasein’s existence is involved and interactive. If his ontological existence is that of a self-interpreting being, then Dasein must be understood to actively create the world he attempts to understand. He may not stand apart from it and rely on his mental faculties to interpret it. He must realize that he has a hand in this world that he observes. If Dasein is to properly interpret worldly entities, he must first realize that his existence grants meaning and significance to the very entities he works to interpret.

### **3. BEING-IN-THE-WORLD WITH OTHERS**

Knowledge and truth are subjective because Dasein is a self-interpreting being. Dasein is too concerned with furthering its own being or cultivating his existence to wipe bias from his human eyes. Man is not an impartial computer capable of first collecting and then interpreting data uniformly or without interest. He is concerned (to further the analogy) with his ability to compute knowledge and the resulting interpretation of this 'data'. Dasein's self-interest in his own abilities and concern for his interpretative results renders him partial and subjective. In the Enlightenment, objects were conceived as cold, hard, ontical facts to be intuited and posited. Now, objects are understood as subjective and relative, as Dasein works to interpret them as he simultaneously interprets himself. Dasein's thought-process affects that which he is thinking about as he simultaneously shapes and interprets. Dasein exists in the world to interpret. Furthermore, as he interprets the world, he grants credence to its existence. Dasein exists in the world to interpret and the world exists only as Dasein interprets it. "We inhabit the world and it can no longer be an object for us but becomes part of us and pervades our relations to other objects in the world" (Dreyfus 45). As Dreyfus eloquently explains "we dwell in our understanding like a fish in water" (Dreyfus 36).

Heidegger explores Dasein's way of "being-in-the-world" to properly draw attention to Dasein as a self-interpreting being. Through the exploration of "being-in-the-world" Heidegger hopes to readjust and change the perception of Dasein and his function within his world. Dasein exists in the very world he creates, perceives, and interprets. "The doing subject constructs and interprets knowledge" (Dreyfus 47). He constructs his reality and then works, only after that construction, to understand it: this is his "being-in-



the-world.” “Being-in-the-world” involves all aspects of both Dasein’s creation and his interpretation of his world or reality. “The relation between me and what I inhabit [the world] cannot be understood on the model of the relation between subject and object” (Dreyfus 45). Dasein is at once the subject and the objects in his attempts to interpret. The world blooms forth from Dasein’s existence, and Dasein then works to understand and explain this blooming. “No sooner was the ‘phenomenon of knowing the world’ grasped than it got interpreted in a ‘superficial’ formal manner. The evidence for this procedure (still customary today) as setting up knowing as a ‘relation between subject and object’ – a procedure in which there lurks as much ‘truth’ as vacuity. But subject and object do not coincide with Dasein and the world” (Heidegger 87).

This fragile and often overlooked relationship between Dasein and its world functions through the ontological modes of care and concern. Our concern involves the way in which we encounter and interact with the world as an extension of a mode of our care. This concern has wrapped up in it Dasein’s motives, intent, thought, and his mode of average-every-dayness in the public sphere. Dasein can never act as the objective scientist. His understanding of an object through his concern, and his designation of this object as a ready-to-hand entity, reflects the bias and motives that shape his interpretation of the object. Dasein, in fact, brings this very object into existence in his world through his designation or assignment of all ready-to-hand entities. Dasein’s being-in-the-world becomes an essential element of Dasein’s constitution and shapes Dasein and the world simultaneously: “in knowing Dasein achieves a new status of Being towards a world which has already been discovered in Dasein itself” (Heidegger 90).

Care is revealed when “Dasein takes a stand on itself through its involvement with things and people: our comportment towards equipment” (Dreyfus 63). The relationship between equipment and Dasein is one of use and manipulation. Activity grants Dasein an understanding of an object. “Is world perhaps a character of Dasein’s Being? Does every Dasein proximally have its world? Does not this world become something subjective?” (Heidegger 92) Dasein’s interested interaction with the world and its objects (care and concern) means that Dasein does not interact with a given world, but instead constructs his own world through his motives, needs, and perceptions, rendering the world both personal and subjective. Thus, to understand fully worldly objects we must first understand how and why Dasein grants being to these objects through the mode of care.

Objective understanding is not possible because Dasein creates and interprets the objects from which it derives and constructs knowledge. Knowledge has become an interactive pursuit of which Dasein is at once the interpreter and the questioner, the teacher and the student. A hammer exists in the world only because Dasein has first seen a need for a hammer within his world. Desiring a tool that functions in the manner of a hammer, then, through the mode of care, Dasein produces an entity in the world. The hammer was concernfully brought into existence by Dasein only when Dasein saw its potential usefulness in constructing objects from wood with nails. This mode of care begins to show how the character of the world is colored by Dasein. Dasein creates a world of entities that will aid him in his desired pursuits.

Worldly objects now become dependent on Dasein’s particular desires. These desires or needs shape Dasein’s interpretation of entities, and thus shape the character and

nature of the world. As Dasein exists and develops, culturally, so too does his world around him. He creates entities of the world through his care to further his developing needs and pursuits. “‘Subject’ and ‘object,’ Dasein and world, are now so ultimately intertwined that one cannot separate the world from Daseining” (Dreyfus 98). The objects of the world exist only in reference to the subject or Dasein who brought these objects into existence to aid his pursuits. When one understands that “knowing belongs to these entities and is not some external characteristic, it must be ‘inside’” (Heidegger 87), the subject-object relationship of the previous tradition becomes irrelevant and unhelpful.

The ontological modes of care and concern expose Dasein’s personal interests and power concerning the world around him. His understanding of all worldly objects is always in reference to him. Knowledge can not be objective, because Dasein himself is not objective. Dasein has needs and desires and creates a world around him that will help him to meet his needs and satisfy his desires. This concept can be illustrated many times over through many different examples: A small circular bowl found in a scientific laboratory will be asserted and understood (through the mode of care) as a Petri Dish or a scientific tool used to research blood cells for a Molecular Biologist. The very same instrument, however, may be asserted and understood as an ice cream dish by a group of scientists in the neighboring laboratory celebrating a birthday party. Neither assertion nor ensuing interpretation is wrong: the apparatus or entity is functioning both as a research tool and as an ice cream bowl. Both interpretations are correct and functional and no one understanding may take priority over the other. These two Daseins simply

“world” differently, and their existence shapes their understanding, creating two different and completely justified truths from the same object.

Dasein asserts meaning relative to his personal desires. The objects of the world and their truth and identity are dependent on the nature of Dasein as the interpreter. If knowledge is objective (as the Enlightenment suggests), a Petri dish would always be a Petri dish, without exception. All beings would posit that particular object as a Petri dish through the function of thought. This is not how worldly objects are seen, however, nor how Dasein interprets the world. The world and its objects are dependent upon Dasein’s interpretation of them, and his worldly interpretation depends upon his specific wants and needs.

The world now becomes integral to Dasein’s very being and relevant to all modes of his being, not something objective and outside of him. Dasein constructs himself and his world concurrently. “Ontologically ‘world’ is not a way of characterizing those entities of which Dasein essentially is not: it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself” (Heidegger 92). “The referential whole [of the world] only makes sense because it all hangs from the for-the-sake-of-which’s that are ways of being of Dasein” (Dreyfus 98). This relationship is a reciprocal one as “Dasein needs the referential whole and the involvement whole to be itself...the ‘objective’ or equipment side is organized in terms of for-the-sake-of-which’s that are ways of being of Dasein” (Dreyfus 98). The Heideggerian definition of the world involves a ‘wherein’ concept of the factual Dasein that lives in the world or is constituted by Dasein’s reflection of himself within the world. The ontological study of this world embraces in itself the *a priori* characteristic of worldhood in general or the world as a necessary constituent of Dasein himself. “There

is world only insofar as Dasein exists...world is now undeniably subjective” (Heidegger qtd in Dreyfus 99), and so too is the knowledge of the world.

The problem of the Cartesian understanding of the world, then, is that “If one fails to see Being-in-the-world as a state of Dasein, the phenomenon of worldhood likely gets passed over” (Heidegger 93). The world cannot be understood or explained in terms of objective Nature or any other ontical category because this is a fallacious understanding of the world, which only exists as Dasein sees it, perceives it, and creates it himself. If one neglects to realize that Dasein creates the world which he interprets, the investigation and ensuing understanding is tainted with false preconceptions or limitations. It is necessary to first properly understand Dasein before one can properly understand the world Dasein allows and creates. Heidegger is showing how to reflect phenomenologically from the correct angle so that the world as an extension of Dasein’s being is not missed, as it has been in the past.

Dasein does not only define the being of entities within the world. He also is the conductor of worldly space and spatiality as regards himself. Worldly space is defined in relation to Dasein’s referential perception of his world. Dasein’s ready-to-hand equipment needs an environment in which Dasein can manipulate and use it. This environment is comprised of regions within the spatiality of the world: “anything constantly ready-to-hand of which circumspective being-in-the-world takes account beforehand, has its place” (Heidegger 137). In this way Dasein creates a world which he is properly oriented and familiar, assigning appropriate places and regions to appropriate things as proceeds with his motivations and needs: “readiness-to-hand, which belongs beforehand to such regions, has the character of inconspicuous familiarity” (Heidegger

137). The world's spatiality is designated by Dasein based on his motivations and needs, regarding the ready-to-hand beings which exist within the places and regions of his world. The world, its spatiality, and its beings are always first and foremost in reference to Dasein. "The environment does not arrange itself in a space given in advance" or preordained through the laws of nature or by the laws of the infinite ideal of God. Rather "its specific worldhood, in its significance, articulates the context of involvements in-accordance-with the world" (Heidegger 138).

Heidegger shows this through his concept of Dasein as essentially de-severant. Dasein alone has the capability to "make the farness vanish" or "make the remoteness of something disappear," eliminating the space between Dasein and the ready-to-hand object bringing it close to Dasein and beyond the limits of its spatial distance "due to Dasein's circumspective concern" (Heidegger 139). Distance and spatiality then do not become ontical measurements based on mathematical or geometrical rules but instead revolve around the circumspective concern or "interests in objects" and to "bring something close means bringing to concerned being-in-the-world" (Heidegger 141). Space is no more than an obstacle separating Dasein from a specific object in his environment. The perceived distance in space is relative to the degree of Dasein's need or want for the object which space is separating from him. Spatial relations are determined by Dasein in terms of Dasein. A dualistic view of a subject-object world becomes impossible: an object cannot exist separate from Dasein's assigning it a place in a region based on its readiness-to-hand. Thus an object cannot exist in space separately from Dasein.

These observations have serious implications regarding theories of knowledge and understanding, as knowledge can no longer be simply posited from the world to Dasein through sense or intellectual intuition. All knowledge and understanding of the world has now become contextual and personal, based primarily on the perspective of Dasein and only secondarily on the object within its viewpoint. “This subjectivity perhaps uncovers the Reality of the world at its most real: circumspective de-severing of Dasein’s every-dayness reveals the Being-in-itself of the ‘true world’-of that entity which Dasein, as something existing, is already alongside” (Heidegger 141). Dasein affects and creates the world based on his needs and motivations regarding ready-to-hand beings and their orientation in the spatial world Dasein creates.

#### **4. WORLDLY KNOWLEDGE AS SUBJECTIVE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

Just as the entities of the world exist only in reference to Dasein (through their ready-to-hand nature) so too does Dasein exist only in reference to other Dasein. “Being-with becomes a characteristic of one’s own Dasein” (Heidegger 157). Dasein must be recognized as a social being that interacts with other Daseins. This interaction forms and shapes the ontological nature or being of every Dasein. “So if one should want to identify the world in general with entities within-the-world, one would have to say that Dasein too is ‘world’” (Heidegger 154). Dasein is a social being and he relates to other social beings “in concerned solicitude with the Other.” “[B]ecause Dasein’s Being is Being-with, its understanding of Being already implies the understanding of Others” (Heidegger 161). Dasein’s social setting, co-existing with other Daseins, becomes a part of his ontological significance. Being-towards Others is an “autonomous, irreducible relationship of Being” (Heidegger 162). Dasein is now understood as an ontologically social being that understands himself as a social being through a reflection on his state in his world.

The quest for knowledge in a comprehensible reality is now further complicated, as the world is not only subjectively created, intuited, and perceived by Dasein himself, but also by the community of Daseins that exist within each personal worldview. Heidegger rejects the Cartesian vision of the Dasein that exists as an “I” or an independent self-sufficient self. The Cartesian “I” exists independently of others, intuiting and forming personal conclusions, without impacting or influencing the reality of the other Daseins (or humans) in his reality. Heidegger shrewdly points out that this is not, in fact, how humans interact or how knowledge of our reality is gathered. Dasein is



an ontologically social being within a reality of other social beings. These social interactions form a community in which Dasein resides, making personal subjectivity impossible.

Culturally, Dasein exists in the public sphere of a world of references in which ready-to-hand assignments have already been made and accepted. Dasein operates without thought of these assignments and freely uses and manipulates these tools without acknowledging their being as ready-to-hand. This acceptance of ready-to-hand objects is present in every aspect of the public world, and so widely accepted that Dasein forgets this important mode of his existence. Present-day Dasein does not have to assign the being of a pen as a ready-to-hand entity used for writing because the being of the pen has already been assigned and accepted and is thus accepted by present Dasein without thought. This assignment of entities is so inherent in Dasein's being and an instinctual mode of being of every Dasein that it has been overlooked and surpassed in the past, which has prevented the authentic ontological study of Dasein.

Through Dasein's participation in the public world, he accepts the being of entities as ready-to-hand objects with specific references and signs designating the object for a specific task. These signs indicate the use of ready-to-hand beings, and their referential structure provides an "ontological clue for characterizing any entity" (Heidegger 108). The sign becomes a relation and the relation has an "ontological source in reference" (Heidegger 108). All the ready-to-hand objects that comprise our public world were at one time present-to-hand objects that were assigned a certain ready-to-hand being for-the-sake-of some motive of Dasein. This mode of Dasein that makes present-to-hand objects ready-to-hand objects is the ontological mode of concern that constitutes

Dasein's primordial relationship to worldly entities. This relationship reminds us that Dasein assigns identities and meanings to all the worldly objects he wishes to interpret and understand. To understand these worldly entities, then, we must first understand ourselves as the primordial being that assigns meaning to these objects.

This is our ontological significance as being-in-the-world. Knowledge of an object becomes inconceivable without first understanding the ontological structure of Dasein. Dasein's being-in-the-world through the modes of care and concern dictates the being of the all worldly entities. The primordial process of assigning 'ready-to-hand' references to entities amounts to Dasein's active participation in the creation of his world. "Being-in-the-world, according to our interpretation hitherto, amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption in reference or assignments constitutive to the readiness-to-hand of a totality of equipment" (Heidegger 107). The world is thus the totality of interests which we allow to be in our world, and not simply a compilation of objects for us to study. In our every day life, "we manipulate tools in the world that already have a meaning in the world that is organized in terms of purposes" (Dreyfus 47).

Heidegger addresses the negative impacts of this phenomenon through his description of the "Others" and his preliminary investigations into the nature of human language. Dasein exists in the world with other Daseins that he encounters in his reality. The interactions between Daseins is different from Dasein's interaction with ready-to-hand equipment present for his use in the world. "These entities are neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand; on the contrary, they are *like* the very Dasein which frees them, in that *they are too and there with it*" (Heidegger 154). As Dasein interprets his constructed reality, the simultaneous interpretations and constructions of other Daseins

now influences and changes this interpretation and construction. Heidegger is thereby shifting attention from a subjective reality of one Dasein to the inter-subjective reality of community. This community constructs an agreed upon vision of reality, merging Dasein's personal subjectivity with the subjectivity of the "Others." Dasein's reality becomes an inter-subjective reality; a community of realities grappling to find cohesion through community and social interaction.

Up to this point the tradition has forgotten Dasein's communion with the Others and thus misunderstood the ontological pursuit of being. In Dasein's average-everydayness he is not aware of this inter-subjective community. Dasein overlooks this aspect of his existence because it has been ingrained historically in every culture and is taken for granted. It is second nature for Dasein to enter into society and accept this particular society's principles, maxims, and language. The 'Others' are encountered environmentally and are an entity different from Dasein, but Dasein is as much a part of the 'Others' as he is an individual entity as himself. "The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with* Others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with* [*Mit-Dasein*]. "We are socially dependent on the 'Others' and join the 'Others' to form a community or a *Mitwelt*. "Not only is Being towards 'Others' an autonomous, irreducible relationship of Being: this relationship, as Being-with, is one which, with Dasein's Being, already is" (Heidegger 162). This communion with others is an important part of Dasein's ontological being. Heidegger points out this relationship, which he feels has been overlooked in the past tradition, so that he may now start to construct an authentic picture of our interpretation of reality and construction of knowledge.

“Dasein, as every-day-being-with-one-another, stands in subjection to Others...One belongs to the Others oneself and enhances their power” (Heidegger 164). The public sphere is constituted of the Others, who jointly construct and imprint Dasein’s consciousness. Thus, the public sphere is a primordial element of Dasein’s being. The “they” forms Dasein’s perspectival view of his world: “The ‘they’ is an existiale and as a primordial phenomenon it belongs to Dasein’s constitution” (Heidegger 167). The public sphere is an ontological feature of Dasein: we are social beings.

Within this community, the ‘they’ forms commonalities or joint agreements that Dasein must logically accept and conform to if he is to remain a member of ‘the They.’ “Thus the ‘they’ maintains itself factically in the averageness of that which belongs to it, of that which it regards as valid and that which it does not, and of that to which it grants success and that to which it denies it” (Heidegger 165). This community of the ‘they’ suppresses the authentic individual Dasein through which the ontological significance of Being speaks. Dasein begins to drown in his average-every-dayness and forget that this is not all of reality, but only one aspect of it. “Yet because the ‘they’ presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its Answerability” (Heidegger 165). The dominance of this community operates subversively in the public realm, silencing or concealing Dasein’s authenticity.

The ‘they’ operates within a human community, which Heidegger calls “publicness” or “the public sphere”. The public sphere necessarily ignores Dasein’s authentic being, working instead to unite all the qualities and aspects of individual Dasein’s being, forming the communal inauthenticity of the “Others.” The domination of

the public sphere is harmful because it suppresses the ontological significance of authentic Dasein.

This public sphere suppresses or conceals Dasein's authentic being. Dasein does not assess the ready-to-hand nature of a pen, he is taught by the public sphere that a pen is used to write. Through this cultural communion Dasein loses or overlooks his authenticity and misrepresents the ontological structure of the world. He forgets that at one point he designated the pen as a ready-to-hand object and simply accepts the definition taught by the public sphere. Dasein now begins to accept the public interpretations of reality and constructions of knowledge and meaning. As a member of a community, this is necessary if the community is to function and interact effectively. The danger is that as Dasein accepts the public agreements and interpretations of the world and reality, he forsakes his own subjective interpretations and ceases to think and see both within a community as well as individually and subjectively.

## 5. COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE TOOL OF LANGUAGE

The public sphere constructs joint interpretations of reality, and asserts communal agreements and truths to which “they” adhere through the tool of language. Language stems from and reflects Dasein’s communal interpretation and understanding. “In understanding, there lurks the possibility of interpretation--that is, of appropriating what is understood” (Heidegger 203). The public sphere reaches a communal understanding of truth and knowledge through the employment of a communal language in discourse. “Discourse is the Articulation of intelligibility. Therefore it underlies both interpretation and assertion. That which can be Articulated in interpretation, and thus even more primordially in discourse, is what we have called ‘meaning’” (Heidegger 204). Through the construction and employment of language, communities display their world. “The fact that language *now* becomes our theme *for the first time* will indicate that this phenomenon has its roots in the existential constitution of Dasein’s disclosedness” (Heidegger 203).

Heidegger shows us that the ways in which we employ our language within our communities expresses something about our authentic being or ontological nature. “Man shows himself as the entity which talks. This does not signify that the possibility of vocal utterance is peculiar to him, but rather that he is the entity which is such as to discover the world and Dasein itself” (Heidegger 208). Our language becomes the tool we use to express our truths. But as with everything else in Dasein’s world, this is not a neutral tool. “In language, as a way things have been expressed or spoken out, there is a hidden way in which the understanding of Dasein has been interpreted...its Being [of language] is itself the character of Dasein. Proximally, and with certain limits, Dasein is

constantly delivered over to this interpretedness, which controls and distributes the possibilities of average understanding and of the state-of-mind belonging to it” (Heidegger 211). Heidegger, and in a different context, Ludwig Wittgenstein, show us how language shapes the very truths it is meant to express.

Language is a fundamental ontological foundation of our communities. Its use works to conceal Dasein’s authenticity in the same manner as the public sphere. We reach a common understanding of agreed truths through the “idle talk” of language: “we have *the same thing* in view, because it is in *the same* averageness that we have a common understanding of what is said” (Heidegger 212). Language has the power (as we will later see through Wittgenstein) of making things so because they are said. Language forms and confirms the public sphere’s desired reality. Language allows these truths to function appropriately through the public sphere through discourse. “Things are so because one says so. Idle talk is constituted by such gossiping and passing the word along—a process by which its initial lack of grounds to stand on becomes aggravated to complete groundlessness” (Heidegger 212). It becomes a tool used by the “they” to accomplish projects and convey necessary information. This “idle talk” is understood by all members of the public sphere and used as a tool or a mode of operation.

Heidegger sees the use of language in the public sphere as a perversion of the true ontological nature of language. Language is the medium, or should be used as the medium, for Being only; not as a tool in the public realm but instead to reveal the authenticity of Dasein and his Being. Idle talk, conversely, is “the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one’s own” (Heidegger 213). The acceptance and use of idle talk grants one membership into the public sphere of

agreed truths and meaning without personal contemplation on the substance of these truths. Through the use of idle talk, Dasein is ontologically cut off from its primary and primordially genuine relationship with the world. This separation prevents Dasein from meditating or contemplating on the nature of the world, instead accepting what is given to him through the discourse of the public sphere. To refer back to a superficial example: a pen is accepted by Dasein as a pen without thought because the public sphere has labeled it and defined it as such. This seems of no consequence to Dasein. However, if the “pen” is changed to “freedom” or “democracy” or “communism” or “censorship,” this idea has greater implications. It is much more problematic if the truth about these entities is simply accepted as such because the public sphere has labeled them so.

The idle talk of the public sphere, then, negatively impacts Dasein’s ability to construct an authentic worldview, because Dasein neglects his mode of authenticity and instead accepts the truths of the “They.” Dasein forgets his true ontological nature and place in his own world as both architect and interpreter, and instead succumbs to the dominance of the public sphere. “We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they take pleasure; we read, see, judge about literature and art as they see and judge...we find shocking what *they* find shocking” (Heidegger 164). Moreover, even if Dasein does not neglect his mode of authenticity and works to construct and interpret his own personal truths, it becomes harder to interpret what is authentic or true and what is no more than words used as tools to further a public goal or reach a public consensus. “And because the “they” constantly accommodates the particular Dasein by disburdening it of its Being, the ‘they’ retains and enhances its stubborn dominion”(Heidegger 165). As authentic language becomes concealed or covered up in Dasein’s average-every-dayness, so too



does the potential to construct authentic truths. Instead, the public sphere reigns and furthers its agreed upon truths through the perverted tool of language.

## **6. TRUTH AS COHERENCE**

Ludwig Wittgenstein understands this phenomenon as well, and shows how language, employed as a tool or a game, has the power to assert truths and certainties within the public sphere of any community which revolves around discourse.

Wittgenstein also shows how language has the power not only to create communal truths and meanings, but also to form our thoughts and thus shapes the authentic truths of Dasein's individual world. Language is based upon our thoughts and employed to express these thoughts. Language does not operate, however, for personal revelation and articulation. Language operates within the framework of a community of those who can speak, listen, and respond. Language then operates through strict rules communally agreed upon. These agreements (different in every community and in every language) form and construct public truths, and these truths form meaning for a society. Indeed for Wittgenstein, even that which we say is "certain" is certain because we have agreed upon it.

Every language works to express truths and also sets the rules for what is to be considered true. Language operates as a complex logical system that maintains symmetry and consistency through principles of non-contradiction concerning the rules for what is to be considered true or false. These rules assure a cohesion that all true propositions will coalesce and support each other, and that all false propositions will force a contradiction within the system if they were to be considered true. This idea of truth is far from a Platonic or messianic ideal of objective correspondence. Now truth is a matter of coherence assured and maintained through a logically principled system.

Truth is not inspired by a communal recognition or affirmation of an ideal. As regards all propositions within language “What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it” (Wittgenstein 2e). If a proposed proposition does not contradict or negate any propositions already accepted as true, we logically accept this proposition as true as well. If the proposed proposition does contradict an already agreed upon truth, then the proposition must be considered false in order to maintain the integrity of the language system.

The syntax and grammatical structures of language functions in an equally logical way as words construct sentences which form propositions to be accepted as true or false. Within a certain language game, “a meaning of a word is a kind of employment of it. For it is what we learn when the word is incorporated into our language. That is why there exists a correspondence between rule and meaning” (Wittgenstein 10e). The meaning of a word becomes no more than “the function of an official...different meanings have different functions...when language games change there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change” (Wittgenstein 10e). The word holds no intrinsic meaning or truth. It gains meaning when the public sphere employs the word continually in a certain way, granting this word a widely accepted and understood meaning.

Truth is now understood as a function of our desire to maintain the integrity of a language game. “The truth of a certain empirical proposition belongs to our frame of reference” (Wittgenstein 12e). Every language game or logical construction has its own set of propositions accepted as true. A language-game assures itself by functioning circularly to maintain the consistent affirmation of the accepted propositions. Truth is no

longer a well of enlightenment to be drawn from and drunk in individual communities. It is no longer the water which English speakers drink from tall glasses, or Chinese sip from tea cups, or Jamaicans drink from Coconut rinds. Truth is no longer convertible throughout communities, transcending difference and conforming to traditions but maintaining a separate integrity of substance, nourishing all communities in a different and unique manner but with the same all important substance. Truth is understood as totally referential. Its substance and message, not its mode of communication, is based on the framework of any particular language-game. Truth now must be seen as “traditional” within each community and distinct to each language game. There is no longer an idealistic overlap of an ideal of truth from culture to culture. Truth is embedded in the construction of cultures and the employment of their language.

Language shapes human beliefs concerning reality. As we speak, we believe what we say to be true or false, as the communal language of the public sphere either confirms or rejects what we say. We necessarily come to believe what we say: thus words become our reality. “The personal picture of our world becomes the...inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false” (Wittgenstein 15e check quote). It is based on this formula that our personal beliefs are accepted or rejected. It is also under this structure from which we learn: the knowledge of what propositions will agree with a pre-ordained language system and which propositions will contradict it.

What we forget is that these words were calculated previously or constructed to affirm this very reality that we believe we are beginning to perceive through the use of our language. Our thoughts and expressions are affirmed by the public sphere only if and only because they are in agreement with the preordained maxims of the public sphere.

The content of our personal thoughts and expressions is not being considered or debated based on its merit or moral implications. Our beliefs, and consequently, our truths are not individual but communal. “The foundation for all beliefs” becomes no more than the communal agreement that “This position I will hold! At the foundation of a well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded” (Wittgenstein 33e). Humans do not ontologically search for meaning but are instead trained to be a member of the public sphere of their respective communities through their understanding and articulation of language: “This system of belief/verification is something a human being acquires by means of observation and instruction” (Wittgenstein 36e). Humans are conditioned to be members of their society and function within the historically agreed upon societal constructs and customs. “This inferred proposition is an instrument for a definite use... ‘we are quite sure of it’ does not mean that every single person is certain of it, but that we belong to a community which is bound together by science and education” (Wittgenstein 38e).

The reality of the world is constructed through the fabric of our language. And this is a language that works to express truths and reject falsehoods. We construct this language logically and thus simultaneously assure its cohesion as we construct it. “It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another mutual support” (Wittgenstein 21e). We construct our truths to logically maintain their truth and then affirm them to be true due to their consistency of truth within our language-game. Reality is based in our language. “It is the truth only inasmuch as it is an unmoving foundation of his language-games...perfect certainty is only a matter of their attitude” (Wittgenstein 52e).

## **PART TWO: COMMONALITY THROUGH CONVERSATION**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

With Heidegger and Wittgenstein we come to see that, knowledge is not clear and not objective. We perceive the world as is relevant to our own being: our perception is always and inescapably perspectival. This perspectival view of the world is the well from which we draw our thoughts and ideas. Man sees the world only in relation to himself. Moreover his language is a direct reflection of himself and the other members of society with whom he communicates. Language reflects meaning, and meaning springs from man's thought and intent. Both of these entities spring forth directly from man, who interacts with the world through care and concern, ontologically preventing any objective knowledge of reality or neutral expression of meaning. Man is ontologically the interpreter of the world, yet he is at the same time the architect of his world.

We construct this world through language, and our interpretation of reality posits reality. Man has no other medium for disclosure than language, and language is contingent on history, and thus perspectival in its nature and implementation. Thus the disclosure of Being or our grasp, perception, and analysis of reality will always be partial, contingent on our place in history and our situation within a culture or society. This understanding of humanity as ultimately and totally grounded within each society's traditions and each society's perceptions leaves philosophy in a bit of a quandary, as its traditional search for universal truth and meaning now seems impossible. To find universal, unchanging truth is, in fact, impossible, but the search for truth itself must be

continued in the philosophical realm. The investigation must simply be resituated in light of the new and changing evidence.

Once the knowledge of man is correctly understood as unavoidably perspectival, the philosophical concern becomes one of the search for truth and meaning within a society. Man expresses himself through language, and language now becomes the proper subject for investigation. The way we use language to express our thoughts suddenly yet appropriately comes to the forefront in the search for truth and meaning. The important discussion is now one of discussion itself. It is a conversation concerned with fostering a conversation that most nearly and correctly reflects a perception of the world. This conversation springs from beliefs expressed through a language which continually affirms and expresses man's personal experience in the world, and simultaneously (as is the nature of language) adds its own layer of meaning to the original tentative.

## **2. PEIRCE: TRUTH IN THE LONG RUN**

Charles Sanders Peirce hopes these proper conversations will eventually inspire superior human action within a community and thus better the community and its understanding of its stance in an ever-changing reality. In an attempt to foster this type of conversation, Peirce creates a methodology of the human activities of doubt and thought. He then shows how these activities bear human belief and how these beliefs produce the conversation that constructs our reality. Peirce does not want to end the investigation for better, more authentic forms of truth: he simply wants to change the criterion of the investigation to include the human's inherent subjectivity, and thus the world's and reality's inescapable subjectivity and inability to possess anything universal. Peirce does not deny the existence of truth and meaning; he simply refuses to posit it as a permanent unchanging entity. For him, truth and reality grow, change, progress, and evolve with the current of the societal conversation in which this truth and reality is imbedded. This search is to be continued through the medium of the language which elucidates human thought, belief, and doubt through conversation.

Peirce first shows that the human being possesses no inherent intuition, introspection, or ability to conceive or interpret anything outside of the mental realm. This theory supports the more relevant claim that all that human beings have come to know and accept as true is extracted purely from the world of experience and not at all a creation of their own intuitive thought processes. "Elementary conceptions [thoughts] only arise upon the occasion of experience; they are produced for the first time according to a general law, the condition of which is the existence of certain impressions" (Peirce 3). All that we come to know through hypothesis and judgment (the process of learning),



then, is rooted in our experience with the world: none of it stems from instantaneous human thought or divine knowledge present in the human faculty of the mind. Human beings have, “no intuition and all knowledge of the internal world is derived by hypothetical reasoning of external facts” (Houser and Kloesel 11). Every thought that passes through the human mind comes directly from an experience. Even if this thought is inspired immediately from another thought, it is still found originally in experience, because the human mind has “no power of intuition [as] every cognition is determined logically from a previous cognition” (Houser and Kloesel 11).

Thus in the human experience as architect and interpreter, man perceives an image which he intuits, thinks, and then attempts to express through an idea. Without the realm of experience or reality, the human template of the mind would remain blank and impotent. The human mind is only useful when presented with experiences drawn from the natural world, which it may then intuit, analyze, and interpret. We know from some of Peirce’s worthy predecessors, especially Kant, that every perception must be subjective. Thus, our perceptions spring forth from the permanent subjectivity of an individual incapable of seeing from any eyes other than his own. Human beings can only know and conceive what they experience and these experiences become the basis for all their thoughts and actions. As Heidegger shows our perceptions are inherently subjective, as Dasein’s view of the world is forever shaped by himself.

Our thoughts come from nowhere else but our perceptions and thus our thoughts, themselves, retain this highly perspectival nature. By denying human beings the power of both introspection and intuition, Peirce shows that human beings are bound by their subjective view of the world and have no internal keys from which to liberate themselves.

Furthermore it logically follows that if humans have no introspection, all that we know has either been revealed to us directly through the realm of experience or is a correlative supposition hinging from or prescinding from an “elementary conception” (Peirce 3) found in experience.

The human mind then works to correlate and categorize these different thoughts presented to the consciousness from the realm of experience. “Therefore, we judge that one concept is contained in another,” (Peirce 41) and in this way we think both reflectively and hypothetically, learning from the correlation and comparison of our thoughts. Immediate thoughts possess no value, as they occur simply in the intellect, activated directly from some element of experience: “an incomplex thought is no more than a sensation or emotion having no rational character” (Peirce 45). What we derive from these thoughts and ultimately retain is “the sum of total consciousness whose mediation is brought about in a real effective force behind consciousness” (Peirce 42). Thus we can grasp permanently nothing truly of reality, as what remains to be reasoned, interpreted, hypothesized, and judged is simply reflective thoughts and not a true image of reality, because these true images exist momentarily and fleetingly in the incomplex experiences of sensation and emotion.

“We have no images even in actual perception: a picture is one constructed by the mind at the suggestion of previous sensations” (Peirce 49). Peirce sees the senses as “abstracting mechanisms” (Peirce 50) which reason takes advantage of and uses to apply to its already present hypothetical constructs concerning reality. “There can be no doubt that anything *is* a sign of whatever is associated with it by resemblance, by contiguity, or by causality; nor can there be any doubt that any sign recalls the thing signified...the

association of ideas consists in this, that a judgment occasions another judgment of which it is the sign” (Peirce 50-51). All that we come to know then is abstracted through the senses and culminates in our judgment: what remains are our judgments and convictions.

Thoughts flow through the mind as actions “consist[ing] in congruence in the succession of sensation which flow through the mind” (Peirce 129). This action begins when the human being experiences a doubt concerning a previous or current action. The goal of the thought process activated by doubt is to arrive at a belief that will silence the previous doubt and achieve the same goal in the future.

Our concept of reality is properly reflected in our beliefs, which give rise to our actions. We conceive first the presence of something and then assert its certain distinct properties. This concept engenders a certain belief regarding certain objects and this belief then determines how we are to act habitually towards these objects or concepts in our reality. “Thus, our action has exclusive reference to what affects the senses...[and our action becomes] habit borne from belief” (Peirce 131). Our ideas (like our beliefs) correspond only to our conceived effects of our believed reality. Thus, our ideas and our beliefs quickly become the expression and framework of our reality as well as reality themselves.

“Thought in action has for its only possible motive the attainment of thought at rest” (Peirce 129). “Thought at rest,” is what Peirce calls belief. Belief becomes real when “we are aware of it,” it works to “appease the irritation of doubt,” and “it involves the establishment in our nature of a rule or action” (Peirce 129). The human being, then, questions an aspect of his reality, and in questioning this aspect doubts the appropriate action. This doubt inspires inquiry or thought which ceases only when a belief regarding

the appropriate action is proved. This “thought at rest” eventually becomes a “rule for action” (Peirce 129).

Action evolves into human habit. These habits are motivated by the perception of outside stimuli and implemented to produce a desired result. Belief gives way to action, action causes doubt, and doubt causes thought which ends upon a belief that overcomes the most current doubt. We see, then, how Peirce can easily assert that the search for objective truths concerning reality should not be considered impotent simply because it has not yet been achieved. We may use our intellect, the tool of reason, to foster authentic, communal discourse concerning our human existence within a community. “The object of reasoning [now correctly used, is] to find out, from the consideration of what we already know, something else which we do not know...giving a true conclusion from a true premise” (Peirce 111). Thus, we must first orient ourselves correctly to allow the truths of the world to ring through us. It is then our human obligation to form these truths into proper or “true” thoughts, beliefs, and actions. From these facts we then rely on the “guiding principles of reason and inference...[to show us] whether a certain conclusion follows from certain premises” (Peirce 112). This ability to reason Peirce considers a “habit of mind,” (Peirce 113) and thus believes that if we are to develop true ideas and beliefs concerning the world, we must first develop our reasoning minds correctly through the implementation of correct habits of reason. “It is a good habit if it produces true conclusions from true premises” (Peirce 113).

Peirce suggests that we infuse the powerful and objective tool of reason into these thoughts to help communicate our ideas clearly and then reach a consensus within a community of humans partaking in this very same activity. Peirce accepts that our

language affects our thoughts and is as much a sign of Being as we are and our thoughts are. Our language, our thoughts, and we, ourselves, work together to reveal something greater than their sum. Thus any human community (including all diverse languages and thought processes) oriented correctly will eventually arrive at the same revelation of the truth of Being. “[T]he very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase in knowledge” (Peirce 52).

This community involves individuals constantly observing, perceiving, and most importantly communicating. “Man and words reciprocally educate each other; each increase in man’s information involves and is involved by, a corresponding increase in a word’s information” (Peirce 54). Our thoughts concerning our perception of reality are transformed into words which we share with others. This community also exchanges their perceptions of reality as we compare and contrast these ideas inter-subjectively.

This would be a conversation of high quality which accepts the perspectival limits of our thoughts, but still works to reach an agreement or draw out of the mélange of subjectivity the strand which rings the most true and is of the highest quality for the community as a whole. This conversation must be continued indefinitely with no expectation of terminating. “[T]hought is what it is only by virtue of its addressing a future thought which is in its value as thought identical with it, though more developed. It is in this way that, the existence of thought now depends on what it is to be hereafter; so that it has only a potential existence, dependent on the future thought of the community” (Peirce 55). Peirce does not, therefore, forsake objectivity; he believes it is the destiny of humanity to eventually arrive at these ultimate truths within the context of

a community where ideas and thoughts are shared and exchanged through the medium of language. “Human opinion universally tends in the long run to a definite form, which is the truth...There is to every question a true answer, final conclusion to which the opinion of every man is gravitating” (Peirce 89). Through this continually evolving and progressing process of thought, discourse, and action Peirce hopes we will eventually arrive at “the Real: that which information and reasoning would finally result in and is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you” (Peirce 52). For Peirce the ‘real’ is “that which is not whatever we happen to think it but is unaffected by what we may think...[it is] the thing which influences our thoughts but is not created by them” (Peirce 88). Peirce is not referring here to a thing-in-itself or a noumenal entity. He is instead elucidating what Heidegger identifies as the essence of Dasein which as the point of disclosure of being, the revelator of the truth.

For Peirce it is a long and fruitful process springing forth from every new action which provokes a new and inquisitive human doubt. This is a process in which every new doubt should be considered a gift, with the possibility to inspire a new and better thought, proffering a more comprehensive belief and thus superior human action in the form of societal habits. If the human race, “were to go on for a million, or a billion, or any number of years you please, how is it possible to say that there is any question that might not be ultimately solved” (Peirce 140)? The Western search for truth is not at its end because it has not yet discovered a satisfying answer: better more comprehensive thoughts and actions generally follow from the immense doubt that the Western search for objective truth has caused. We are simply in an ongoing, fruitful process producing better, more sophisticated thoughts and ideas, which give way to productive actions and

societal habits. This proper discourse is inspired from nowhere other than the world itself and society's perceptions. The worthy conversations of society are brought forth from the individual human doubts experienced personally within every human psyche. These doubts will inspire better conversations.

### **3. RORTY: THE NEO-PRAGMATIST**

Richard Rorty does not share Peirce's belief that at some point the search for truth will come to an end. He simply wants to outline a method in which the human language can work to show why some beliefs are better than others. For him the solution comes when a society accepts its "ethnocentrism" and works within its perspective to construct the best, most comprehensive answer. This truth is forever temporal and changing as each society molds its truths from its needs and its perceptions. Through discourse these flexible truths are continually adjusted, necessarily adapting to the observed changes and improvement of a society.

Rorty rejects the idea of a univocal or universal truth for all of humanity, and readjusts truth's definition to reflect its temporal and perspectival qualities. Rorty rejects the univocal definition of truth replacing it with his pragmatist definition of truth. Truth becomes "in William James' phrase, what is good for *us* to believe" (Rorty 22-23). Truth becomes accessible, as it is no longer an elusive ideal to be revealed or found outside of our communal reality. The desire for truth is now understood as "simply the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of "us" as far as we can" (Rorty 23). Truth is now something to be constructed uniquely within each individual community. Moreover truth is now a tangible concept that can be used to further improve and better every society's unique and changing beliefs. The potential for better truth is always unfolding, becoming more accessible to each community.

The scientific community provides a worthy example of a community operating on this new definition of truth, as scientific truths are constantly adjusted and changed in light of a better, more comprehensive conversation concerning a particular quandary.



Rorty refers to the scientific community to show how societies through conversation better the language tool, allowing for agreement within a community. “We should relish the thought that the sciences as well as the art will *always* provide a spectacle of fierce competition between alternative theories, movements, and schools. The end of human activity is not rest, but rather richer and better human activity” (Rorty 39). The scientific community proceeds through discussion concerning hypothesis and only accepts the theories which have not yet been falsified. This communication progresses and betters the understanding of particular inquiries through the exchange of ideas through the medium of language within a community. “The only sense in which science is exemplary is that it is a model of human solidarity. We should think of the institutions and practices which make up various scientific communities as providing suggestions about the way in which the rest of culture might organize itself” (Rorty 39).

Rorty explains in his essay, “Science as Solidarity,” that beliefs justify themselves not with scientific facts but through ‘critical reflection.’ He then defines critical reflection as “some way of obtaining cognitive status without the necessity of discovering facts” (35). This critical reflection takes place through societal conversation. Thus, truth can only be communicated through the medium of language.

Through multiple attempts at communicating multiple truths, however, one version may emerge as the one agreed to be the best, most comprehensive, or most true. “[T]he best way to find out what to believe is to listen to as many suggestions and arguments as you can” (Rorty 39). This preferred notion of truth will come from the most successful and authentic discourse. What now becomes of ultimate importance is the possibility of reaching valid and beneficial agreements within a society. If we are to

draw our truths through a communal consensus derived from discourse, this discourse must be of the highest and most authentic quality and nature. For Rorty, there is nothing greater than the “preservation and enhancement of civilization. [This community] would identify rationality with that effort, rather than with the desire for objectivity. So it would feel no need for a foundation more solid than reciprocal loyalty” (Rorty 45). For Rorty, through conversation we construct communal beliefs to help human cope with its inevitable human condition. Through better conversation we will reach better beliefs, and these beliefs will be our reality.

#### **4. TRACY THE NEED FOR CONVERSATION**

David Tracy stands as somewhat of a link or compromise between Peirce and Rorty, as he accepts the intersubjective nature of belief but still believes that we are striving to disclose an ultimate reality. “Reality is what we name our best interpretation. Truth is the reality we know through our best interpretation” (Tracy 48). We must still proceed to try and better our communities with reference to inaccessible objective ideals. We must proceed through conversation. Every conversation commenced and pursued by worthy questioners is a step closer to a better way, a better method, and a deeper understanding. “Without genuine conversation, no manifestation. Without manifestation, no real dialogue” (Tracy 28). If our voices are silenced, so too is our essence as human beings. Our essence has become clear as that of the interpreter. We exist to make sense of what we perceive. We are reasoning beings so that our instinctual questions may be answered in a methodical and satisfactory way. If we are to deny ourselves the continued pursuit and involvement of our essence because we now deem it to be too daunting and frustrating, we are denying our humanity.

Thus it is imperative that the conversation continue, and that we grant ourselves, our communities, and our societies the flexibility and humility to allow the perpetual conversation to properly orient us towards the world in a way in which Being will one day be revealed. The conversation thus far has led us to “new understandings of truth as the interplay of disclosure-concealment-recognition...[and]the recovery of conversation as a way to truth” (Tracy 30). The question quickly and appropriately now turns to the proper and, of course, rational method for a conversation concerning Being which will ultimately lead us to a satisfactory answer.

This objective places us in an “abyss of indeterminacy,” (Jacques Derrida quoted in Tracy 59) as we must first philosophize on how exactly to settle this question or the proper method for discourse before we may actually converse about substance. While this is a necessary and worthy pursuit, it seems many have abandoned ship due to the somewhat dry character of social inquiry in comparison to the greater metaphysical inquiries for which the current conversation is no more than a rigorous preparation and definite prerequisite. Thus the appropriate conversation at the beginning of inquiry concerns itself with what makes a truly fair and rational conversation and what method and practice is most suitable for discourse. While this conversation progresses towards its predestined and correct conclusion, however slowly, we must simply remember not to become lost in the details and never lose sight of our paramount destination. “Method, explanation, and theory aid understanding but they are not all, none can replace the actual conversation itself. When we are conscious of what they are we can use them” (Tracy 46).

Worthy discourse must work to envelop the other and allow his opinion to take precedence for a moment to permit an analogical understanding. This understanding is facilitated through the “analogical imagination” which shows that “differences and otherness, once interpreted *as* other and *as* different, are thereby acknowledged and in some way possible and in the end analogous” (Tracy 93). It is in this way that we start to find similarities not only in the human questions but now finally in the human responses as well. If we can learn to converse analogously (incorporating the other point of view with ours in order to find similarities), the universals of all our different, or other, responses will become quickly apparent. What is true for me and true for you will

quickly become what is true for us, even if only through analogy. “Any one who can converse can learn to appropriate another possibility. Between person and person...there exists in every authentic conversation an openness to mutual transformation” (Tracy 93).

This “mutual transformation” will produce beliefs concerning Being that will temporarily and adequately sate us, until new doubt arrives and new conversations begin. “Let the action of natural preferences be unhindered and under their influence let man, conversing together and regarding matters in different lights, gradually develop beliefs in harmony with natural causes” (Peirce 118). We must engage in analogical discourse, so that this truth and meaning may be revealed through us in our language.

## 5. CONCLUSION

We may in fact “well live in a ‘time in-between’” (Tracy 51) in our philosophical history, as answers seem far away and our approach slow and shaky. Simply waiting for their revelation, however, will not sufficiently propel us forwards into a more fruitful area of societal conversation. But the simple fact that the conversation has not yet died and that some brave voices continue to argue for the metaphysical as a worthy subject for philosophy is a step forward out of the ambiguous and into the next phase.

Conversation is the way in which humans come to understand themselves and their situation. Discourse through language will remain our marginal mark on the tableau of Being, as “we belong to history and language, they do not belong to us” (Tracy 29). Language will become the vessel we navigate on the sea of humanity, hoping to arrive eventually at a lighthouse of meaning and understanding. “There is, in every true manifestation, an intrinsic, that is dialogical, interaction between the object’s disclosure and concealment and the subject’s recognition. That interaction is conversation” (Tracy 28). Language will be the vessel, but conversation will be the captain.

Unease is both warranted and beneficial, as this is the same unease which will fuel the conversations. These conversations will become the springboard for new doubt, new belief, and thus new action, which will start the never-ending pattern of humanity anew. “The good, the true, the beautiful, and the holy are present in our history. These realities need continual retrieval by unrelenting conversation” (Tracy 71). Our essential task is simply to continue this conversation. Though our destination is currently unknown we must keep moving. We must allow language to dynamically express our

ever-changing selves and thus our ever changing reality. This is, after all, what we have at the moment: ourselves, our community, and our voices both collective and unique.

For now it seems that the only objective truth is that all truth is, in fact, subjective. It is our duty as human beings to forge together to form something worthy and real from this human collage of subjectivity. This formation occurs every time one starts the conversation anew and allows it to conclude somewhere it has never been. This is the destiny of the reasoning being and the only way he will ever satisfactorily experience the Being of the universe. We must strive to arrive at ultimate truths within the context of a community where ideas and thoughts are shared and exchanged through the medium of language.

Instinctively we feel a need to continue this conversation concerning the ultimate truths, despite its seeming dead end. We feel this need instinctually because this desire and need for answers concerning our universal existence is what is essentially human about all of us. Thus, we may choose to change our behavior and cease the conversation out loud, but the questions will always remain within us, because to question and then to interpret is what constructs our essential and thus universal humanity as a rational animal. “[A]ny human being can ask the fundamental questions that are part of the very attempt to become human at all...the question of the meaning of that ennui that can erupt into a pervasive anxiety, even terror, in the face of some unnamable other that seems to bear down upon us at certain moments; the question of why we sense some responsibility to live an ethical life even when we cannot rationally prove why we should be ethical at all...the question of why I possess a fundamental trust that both allows me to go on at all and is not reducible to all my other trusts...” (Tracy 86-87)

The list could continue *ad infinitum*, and any human could add to this list questions that seek to know exactly what it means to be human. If we cease the conversation, all we do is terminate the possibility to soothe our torturous desire to answer these questions. The questions will not disappear; if repressed they will become nasty provocations instead of guiding stimulants. The conversation, however, though it may not lead us to an ultimate answer, eases the suffering of our desiring curiosity, and helps us to better understand what it means to be human.



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